

## **“Overcoming Temptation”**

**Hebrews 2:18; 4:15-16    Matthew 4:1-11**

**Scott B. Martin - March 8, 2009**

Temptation is older than the Bible and more current than this morning's newspaper. We get no further in the Bible than chapter three of Genesis then we find ourselves reading about the serpent who was “more crafty than any other wild animals” tempting Eve to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. That's when the trouble begins isn't it? Knowledge of good and evil, that's when the struggle ensues isn't it? Prior to the knowledge of good and evil life in this world was paradise, but once humanity learns to distinguish between good and evil then humanity can no longer live in paradise on earth. Humanity is put in the position of having to CHOOSE between good and evil and in our choosing experience satisfaction and peace of mind or guilt and shame.

One of the major factors, in my view, of the development of religion is this very human struggle of having to choose between good and evil. Those forces which help us decide for the good are said to come from God and those forces which tempt us to engage in evil and sin are from Satan. To be human is to experience temptation that leads to sins of all kinds. The claim of faith is that we do not have to engage in this struggle alone. Temptation can be overcome and when it is not, forgiveness and grace are possible from people around us and if not from them then from God and one can make a fresh start.

Those of you who are my age or older will remember the great furor that arose when Jimmy Carter was running for president. He was the first southern evangelical Christian to be elected president. A great furor arose

when he gave an interview to a Playboy reporter and in the interview admitted that he struggled with “lust in his heart.” Some thought this made him a hypocrite. How could he be a Christian and experience lust in his heart?

This is a rather silly question, but we human beings have all kinds of silly ideas, like faith will keep you from experiencing temptation. WRONG! Remember David seeing Bathsheba on her rooftop and what happened next? Think about Jesus in our gospel passage today, Jesus, the Son of God, just baptized and no sooner is he baptized then he is tempted three times out in the desert.

The reason Jimmy Carter got into such hot water over the interview was that he was being completely honest about one of the ways he experienced temptation. Faith can most certainly help us deal with temptation when it comes our way but it can not shield us 100% from experiencing temptation. Temptation is a given in life. It is worth pointing out, that as far as we know, President Carter, unlike a number of other occupants of that high office, never gave into lust while president. I have no doubt that his deep love for Rosalyn and his faith, helped him in this matter.